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Good afternoon,

I am Jeff Driessen, I live here in Helena and I'm a concerned parent. This is not my first time before many of you talking about the same things I talked about before

Let me begin by thanking each of you for being here, that is commendable, I'm sure that it often feels as if everyone here is blaming you personally. Let me assure, we're not.

I also need to say, that the very fact that we are here again or still here, is heartbreaking. We are not talking about numbers or paper or books, we are talking about children's lives, and then their children's lives. We are talking about families and then their ~~friend's~~ families.

The issues raised in previous meetings are the same issues we have now, only now, due in part to inaction, they have grown. We've all seen the recent headlines, you guys may have discussed them already.

*THESE STORIES ARE NOT ISOLATED INCIDENTS
THEY ARE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG.*

For anyone here who claims that the legislature, the democrats the republicans are to blame, you are wrong. Plain and simple.

The fault lies with all of us and CPS. For too long, the cries and complaints of the most vulnerable have been ignored by CPS as the rest of us thought that they were helping. Oh I know, people have had meetings, and hearings and meetings about hearings. That is not action. It's time to act, it's past time to act. If you're hoping or expecting someone else to get the ball moving, please don't. Don't just attend these meetings so you can tell someone that you did. Attend these meeting to exact real change, or ask me, I will do it.

I have been personally involved in the foster system and the CPS system for a number of years. Everything you are about to hear is the direct result of personal experience and personal observation. What I am about to tell you is for effect, I could tell you more, but you'll get the idea.

I have read many, if not all, of the current laws we have here in Montana regarding child welfare. They were created for the sole purpose of protecting our children, I'm not sure we need any more laws. However, Child Protective Service has policies and procedures that circumvent and ignore many of these laws.

The reason that this is happening is because, as multiple CPS people from caseworkers all the way up have stated, and here I quote "we are our own criminal justice system, once we take a kiddo, we can do whatever we want, it's our decision." That statement is just simply not true. CPS is not a criminal justice system, They do not have criminal justice training. We have a criminal justice system and CPS is required to work within it not make policies that ignore it.

I have watched helplessly as children were removed from a loving, caring home, where their previously neglected health was finally taken care of, where the child psychologists said they should stay, where the schools gave reports of the children excelling due to their new environment. Where children as young as 6 have been diagnosed with PTSD. Did you hear that? Little children with

diagnosed PTSD were placed back into the abusive home against all of the recommendations of multiple healthcare professionals. Now the younger half-brother is suspected of having PTSD because CPS placed both boys back into the home, knowing fully that multiple healthcare professionals had determined the cause of the PTSD was the father. Neither parent had completed, or really started any type of program that would teach them how to care for their children; they hadn't received any drug rehabilitation treatment or anger management treatment. And this wasn't their first time having children removed, between them they had lost custody of 4 children already and another had died, yet they've never been charged with any crime. Yet they just wanted their kids back and CPS obliged.

HAD THEY
BEEN SOLDIERS,
they would
not have
been sent
back to war.

CPS was informed that the youngest girl, a 4 year old, had been checked over by a doctor. The doctor said that there was vaginal scarring inside her. The child was referred to another doctor for verification. The subsequent physician concurred. They suspected as did the little girls mental health doctor that she had been molested multiple times. When CPS was informed and warned due to the fact that there was an older step sister, CPS informed them that since there was no real relation between the girls, even though they shared the home and parents, it was a separate issue and was ignored. The 10 year old girl was placed back in the home where she was molested repeatedly until someone else found out and notified police. Now the dad is awaiting court and sentencing. The little girls are looking forward to a lifetime of psychological issues caused as a direct result of CPS. CPS bares no responsibility for their action.

I have witnessed as CPS retaliated against caregivers who expressed concern for these and other incredible lack of judgment decisions.

I witnessed CPS disregarding the Federal laws concerning native children because the Caucasian dad, who was the person responsible for the PTSD, and the drugs, convinced the caseworker that he had sole custody, no documentation provided or required, and when the CPS worker learned that he was lying, while they visited the dad in jail who had been arrested for yet another crime, they continued to ignore the federal law. Until this time the biological mother had not been informed that her children had been removed from the fathers home and had been living with a foster family for 6 months, she was paying child support from her federal job, yet they claimed that they couldn't find her. Had she skipped a payment you can bet they would have located her. I witnessed as the mother had to quit her job, move to Montana and fight for a year and a half to regain the children, her children, her native children. She had no CPS charges or Law enforcement issues. CPS was questioning the accuracy of the federal background check she had been required to take as a condition of employment. Really?

CPS has gotten all caught up in the reunification mantra. So much so that they claim a parent doing drugs or dealing drugs is ok, as long as it is kept separate from the children. There is no healthcare professional anywhere that will agree with that statement. It worth mentioning that if CPS knows, as they claim they do, of parents who are dealing drugs out of their home, that is criminal. They claim they are their own criminal justice system yet they encourage and harbor criminal activity.

CPS is targeting the most vulnerable citizens of this State for profit. The citizens with the least chance to fight back, the poor. The citizens with no resources, who have limited education, the ones who need State attorneys to help them fight the State, when they encounter someone who doesn't fit into this category they do all they can to remove the children from their care, they lie, they falsely accuse, and they use the children as pawns. I'm a pretty firm believer in "follow the money" I've watched and listened as CPS claims they are over worked, under staffed and under paid and then watched as they perpetuate the problems. That doesn't mean everyone is a problem, but some key people are and they surround themselves with likeminded individuals. It's time to end it.

I can go on and on about the CPS system and its absolute failure, its irresponsible actions, its often illegal actions, its disregard for State and Federal laws, and its intentional harming of the children they are supposed to protect, but instead, I want to talk about changes.

It's time to require that all removals follow state law in regards to search and seizure, court authorized search warrants, police must be present and in charge. Before you jump and say, "but if the lives are in danger", remember we have laws allowing for that also.

Show cause hearing needs to be held within 15 calendar days of removal, no exceptions. If CPS has enough concern and evidence to remove the children then they should be able to justify it quickly. I've watched as people have waited months for their hearing while CPS tries to "gather evidence". There's no excuse, you either have enough or you don't.

Parents whose children are removed need to be charged with whatever crime they committed. CPS currently steps in and keeps the parents from being charged, by doing this they perpetuate the illegal behavior. Did you know that you have parents out there whose children have been removed multiple times for the same criminal activity and yet no criminal charges have ever been filed? Real law enforcement doesn't know, the judges don't know. If the children were removed, it's because the parents were doing something that there are laws against, charge them, it is the judges responsibility to excuse or reduce the sentence.

When a parent is being investigated for sexual abuse, children should not be placed back into the home during the investigation.

When a parent is charged with sexual abuse, there should be no contact with any children. CPS does not know better.

When a healthcare professional recommends no contact, there needs to be a reasonable reason why those recommendations are not followed.

Reunification should be a goal, but not the first priority. Our State law says that the child's health and welfare is to be of paramount importance, the first priority. And it should be. To successfully have reunification, a few things need to happen